THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P.O. BOX 8 KING, ONT., CANADA

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HERE IT IS!!

By now you've all received the brochure on RSR-4 -- "Ragtime Down The Line" by Charlie Rasch. Of course, we can't give you an actual sample from this latest Society LP here - although Tom Shea did a fine job of describing Charlie's style in the brochure - but we very proudly present the finished album jacket.

It should be pointed out that Charlie's LP is a bit of a departure from the usual RSR recording routine. The whole shooting match was conceived, engineered and directed in Detroit, which left us with the relatively easy jobs of pressing and printing the final product in Toronto. Full credit for the excellent creative content of RSR-4 goes to the very capable and enthusiastic gang in the Motor City: recording artist Charlie Rasch and his back-up team of Tom Shea, Walt Gower, John Teachout, Edward Fella and Howard Rogers.

A word about the artwork illustrated above -- in our humble opinion, this has got to be one of the finest record jackets of all time! Walt Gower and his associates have certainly coordinated a magnificent work of art. Walt's efforts on behalf of the Society have always been more than generous, and have endowed many of our projects with a quality that is very deeply appreciated.

Order <u>your</u> copy of RSR-4 today!

This article on popular music in Detroit was written by our Detroit Public Library consultant, Lawrence W. Brown. It appeared in the Winter, 1958, 59, issue of AMONG FRIENDS, quarterly publication of the Friends of the Detroit Public Library, Inc.

The information in Mr. Brown's article was gathered largely from the more than 7,000 popular music titles in the Music and Drama Department's sheet music collection. This extensively used resource, organized by title and date, contains hits which span the years from 1804 to the present time.

Our thanks to the Friends of the Detroit Public Library for their kind permission to reprint this article.

Tom Shea

"AN AWFUL LOT OF MUSIC IN DETROIT"

by Lawrence W. Brown
First Assistant, Music and Drama Department

There is a tune which has moved so far into the realm of folklore that almost everyone can whistle it, many dance to it, but nobody can name it. Those who do name it usually call it by some other than its true one, for, like other folk tunes, it has many titles. But this gay old fiddle tune is one of Detroit's musical incunabula. It was born THE DETROIT SCHOTTISCH, "written by A. Couse and published by him at his Bazaar at No. 137 Jefferson Avenue," in 1854. Couse's little tune quickly danced its way across the country and beyond. Thus auspiciously began Detroit's music publishing business, a business which for seventy-five years afterwards flourished and grew, repeating and exceeding the success of THE DETROIT SCHOTTISCH, and making Detroit second only to New York in the production of hits.

There have been well above fifty publishers of music in Detroit. To determine the exact number is difficult because of lack of records, vagaries of the publishers, and the problem of defining a music publisher. Other than the evidence on the sheet music itself we have no information on our publishers except a few brief announcements of new publications in the local press. And, though the flood of music from Detroit houses is such as to overwhelm one who tries to study it, anyone familiar with music imprints knows that the information which may be derived from them is more likely to be mystifying than illuminating. A few things we can learn about Detroit music:

1. There was an AWFUL lot of it ("awful" may be interpreted as the reader pleases).

2. Music publishing was a business that paid.

3. While it was a steadily lucrative business, music publishing was unstable and unreliable. Evidence of its lack of stability is the constant change of imprint on the music of all publishers. Still in 1854 an edition

of THE DETROIT SCHOTTISCH appeared with the names of Amsden & Cargill, "successors to A. Couse;" and the C. J. Whitney imprint, from its beginning in the late 1860's until it became Jerome H. Remick & Co. around forty-five years later, changed somewhat from year to year. The unreliability of the business is pointed to by the fact that it was almost always a side line for the large publishers as well as for the small ones. C. J. Whitney, the largest nineteenth century publisher, had a music store, two theatres, and a real estate business. Even Remick had other interests.

4. The history of music publishing in Detroit was long, honorable, and sometimes spectacular. It began with Couse in 1851 (DETROIT SCHOTTISCH was his third publication) and grew continuously until its demise with the departure of Remick in the middle 1920's. The first forty years was its parochial period, that is, most of the music published in Detroit was written by Detroiters for Detroiters. However, around 1890 Whitney-Warner and other publishers began publishing ragtime, and Detroit immediately became a national music center.

5. Detroit publishers recorded social history and made musical history. This last area is the one we will concern ourselves with especially.

The picture of Victorian Detroiters as seen in their popular music is a fascinating one. They were a dancing people and a singing one. They loved sports and the theatre and being sad and courting and growing old. They hated liquor (for a while) and seemed not to enjoy laughing, for the comic song is a type prominently missing from the Detroit repertoire especially before 1890. Happily, they lacked reticence, at least musically, for they burst into song on almost any pretext.

All Detroit musical incunabula - Couse's publications - are dance tunes. THE BLOOMER POLKA (with a Bloomer Girl gracing the cover) came first. It was soon followed by THE DETROIT POLKA, THE DETROIT SCHOTTISCH, and the OLD FOLKS QUADRILLES, the latter by Stephen Foster. Detroit celebrated its events, scenes, and people - or, when no special excuse presented itself, its existence - in dancing. EXPOSITION POLKA commemorates the Detroit International Fair of 1889, and the old Detroit Opera House was honored with a polka in 1868. Mayor Maybury received the dedication of a schottisch bearing his name, as did the lake ship ILLINOIS. NEPTUNE POLKA was dedicated to the Neptune Engine Company No. 6, while BELL POLKA was written for the Germania Musical Society and has a picture of the Society's orchestra on its cover.

All this dancing makes our Detroiters look frivolous. It isn't so. They obviously danced with heavy hearts. One can accept as sincere the grief expressed in THEY SLEEP IN THE SOUTH and other songs of the Civil War, but the orgies of self-pity which followed the war are a bit too much: NO ONE CARES FOR ME, I'VE NO HOME, LEFT ALONE, I'VE NO MOTHER NOW, HOMELESS AND BLIND, THE LITTLE CHILD'S BURIAL, and WE HAVE LAID HER IN THE GARDEN.

After dancing and crying, Detroiters preferred sports, the military, funerals, business and industry, current events, Detroit, Belle Isle, and their fellow-citizens as subjects of their music. There are many examples in each of these categories, but a few will suffice. Baseball has long been an inspiration to Detroit song writers. In 1867 there was the TYRO BASE BALL MARCH; in 1887, THE PENNANT WINNER'S TRIUMPHAL MARCH; and in 1934, TIGERS ON PARADE. Covers on the first two bear pictures of Detroit teams. The Clough & Warren Organ Company, L. B. King, Grinnell's, The Detroit Free Press, and the

J. L. Hudson Company are among the businesses honored musically. The Hudson song, WHEN GRAND CIRCUS PARK WAS UPTOWN, was written by Detroit's most famous composer, Dick Whiting. It is ironic that of the great number of automobile songs very few have come out of Detroit. Music dedicated to Detroit residents abounds, but one family was particularly blessed. According to a notice in the DETROIT TRIBUTE, June 29, 1877, "Prof. Mazurette gave a piano solo...his own Meditations in memory of the late Jos. Campau...." This may have been an improvisation, as no copy has been found. Other Campau dedications do exist in printed form, however. Mazurette's SUMMER NIGHT is dedicated to Mrs. A. T. Campau, WILLIE'S POLKA to A. T. Campau's dog, and BESSIE to his fast-trotting mare. Willie and Bessie got their pictures on the covers of the music. As has been suggested earlier, ANY event might call some Detroiter to lyricism, and so we have OUT OF THE OLD HOUSE, INTO THE NEW.

(To be concluded in the next issue.)

REPRINT CLUB

The next mailout to the Reprint Club will be at the end of May and will include the following numbers:

ON EASY STREET (IN RAGS) - J. Reginald MacEachron
AUGUSTAN CLUB WALTZES - Scott Joplin
MEADOWLARK RAG - Thos. Pitts
WILD CHERRIES RAG - Ted Snyder
WHO LET THE COWS OUT? (A BULLY RAG) - Chas. Humfeld

These numbers are also available to non-members of the Reprint Club at $1 each postpaid, minimum order $2.

From a satisfied Reprint Club customer: "Just a word or two to tell you that the most recent selections of the Reprint Club were the best ever! Not only the rare gems of Joplin, but the fine Hampton AGITATION RAG, and the delightful WHITTLING REMUS, which is a neglected nugget if I ever saw one! Sounds like something Hunter would write; who is Thos. Broady? Could it be a Hunter pen name, I wonder? I hope you keep on coming up with such fine choices in the reissue department." Bill Mitchell

SONGS FATHER SANG

This is the title of a delightful booklet which we have treasured ever since Russ Cole sent us a copy last year. It is a 24-page "Roundup of Favorites of the Centuries" compiled and edited by Russ, which is a real goldmine of information about songs, the people who composed them, when they were composed and who sang them. The numbers are arranged chronologically and alphabetically, and in many cases are annotated with intriguing bits of information. The period from about 1850 to 1920 is particularly well covered; in fact, the booklet should be considered a must for anyone interested in ragtime and/or music from the Turn of the Century. Please note: this is a list of song titles by year -- there's no music, lyrics or lengthy commentary -- in short, a reference source.

Russ has a limited number of these booklets left and is offering them to Society members at 35¢ per single copy, 25¢ each for two or more copies. Those are bargain prices if we ever saw them -- the Barbershoppers sold this item to their members at $1 per copy. Please forward all orders and remittances directly to Russell Cole, Eureka Springs, Arkansas, 72632.

Reprinted from the Peterborough,
Ontario 'Examiner' March 19, 1966

Piano roll blues have special meaning to Cobourg restorer

by Richard Sadleir

THERE were a great many songs written about the player piano, that popular predecessor to the phonograph and radio.

Songs such as "Put Another Nickel in . . ." and "Piano Roll Blues" have all but been forgotten; and like them, those living room monsters that inspired song writers have sunk into obscurity.

People have forgotten that, at the start of the 20th century, player pianos of one form or another were common in many overstuffed living rooms, silent-film theatres, beer parlors and even the dingy house of ill repute.

Today, the sight of these hulking pieces of wood and metal machinery is anything less than exciting.

Yet there are a few who turn red-faced and wide-eyed at the slightest glimpse of these 900-pound goliaths. Their hands tremble and their brows perspire at the mere mention of them.

Copy writer

Among this few is Cobourg's Ken Vinen, a 25-year-old advertising copy writer for the local radio station.

The rotund Mr. Viven lives two lives. One, is as a jovial writer and jack-of-all-trades at radio station CHUC.

But at night the attic of his downtown second-storey apartment is filled with the glare of overhead lights and the smell of hot glue.

Restoring player pianos is his second life and, he admits his first love.

His dream began when he was a boy of 13 living in Edmonton, Alta. There he often visited a nearby piano factory.

The craftsmen tolerated his visits and put him to work doing the minor tasks involved in building pianos.

After he left his Edmonton home, Ken didn't have much chance to follow through with his interest. It was not until three years ago that he managed to scrape together enough money to purchase his first player piano.

With the scant experience of his past and a great deal of mechanical ability, he tore the dusty old machine down to the very last screw and reassembled it. It worked.

Since then, he has had a steady stream of player pianos pass through his workshop.

His latest job has been to restore all the components from a coin-operated piano from the Ports of Call in Toronto.

Not only does this machine play standard and honky-tonk piano but includes two drums, a series of organ pipes, triangles and cymbals.

Takes 200 hours

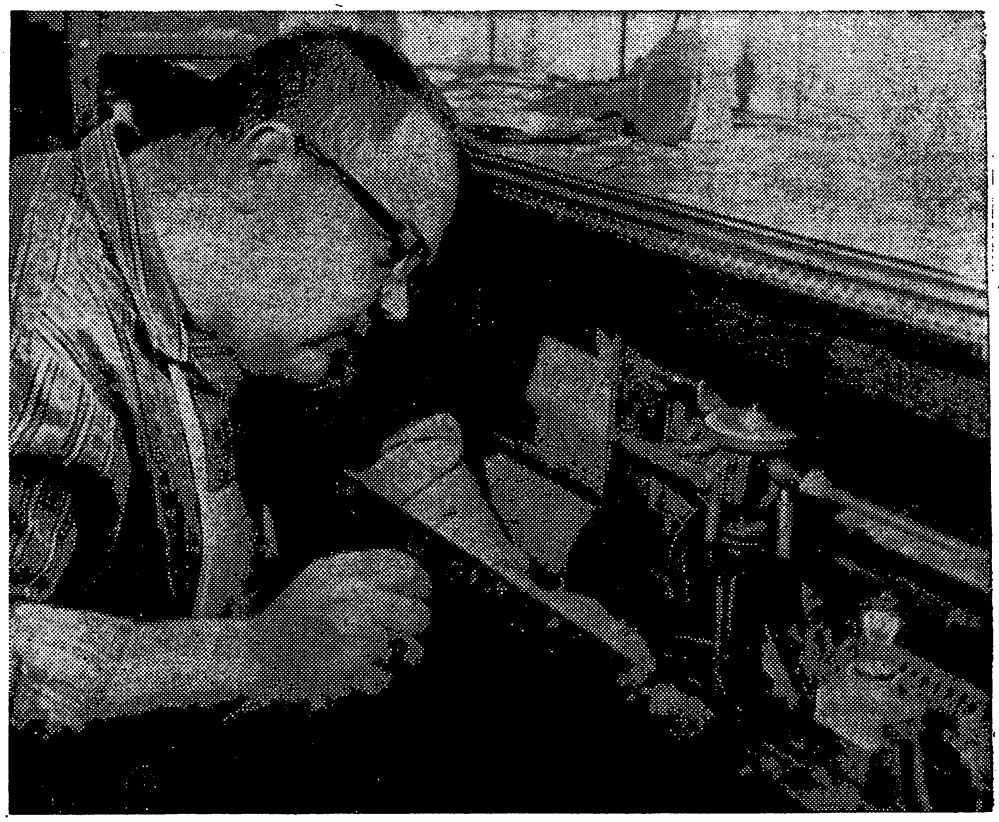
It takes Ken about 200 hours to restore an ordinary piano. This includes regluing all parts, replacing worn gears and fabrics. When a piano is returned to its owner, it is literally "good as new."

In addition to restoring pianos, there are the "finds". Rare and hard-to-find specimens that turn up in basements, attics and old barns.

A true collector, Ken keeps his eyes and ears open for machines to add to his already large collection.

Often, howver, the search ends in disappointment. Ken tells the story about his search for some rare old hotel pianos at a hotel in the Bancroft area.

After weeks of investigation, he arrived at the hotel to find



—(Richard Sadleir Photos)

MANY PLAYER PIANOS ARE ELECTRICALLY-OPERATED
To Ken's dismay, owners sometimes remove the parts

that the building had burned to the ground taking three classic machines with it.

Coin-operated players are often confused with the common expression "nickelodeon". The term was originally applied to the silent movie machines but was later used for coin-operated record players or juke boxes.

Name confusion

Recently, Ken spent considerable time tracking down a former restaurant owner who supposedly had a room full of nickelodeons. They turned out to be juke boxes.

More often than not, the lead is tracked down and a magnificent piano is found sitting in a barn, covered with grime and straw.

The excitement of the find soon turns to disappointment and anger when he discovers that all the automatic apparatus has been removed. To the collector, what remains is just another piano.

Piano tuners are the biggest enemies of player pianos, says Ken.

Tuners, because of the difficulty in tuning a piano crammed with a maze of pumps, gears and tubes usually suggest that the paraphenalia be removed.

The unknowing owners give their consent and much valuable apparatus lands on the junk heap.

"These people should realize that, even if they don't want a player piano, there is a growing market for them right here in Ontario," he cautions.

Still make rolls

The uninformed player piano owner will say: "But where can I get rolls for the piano?"

There are three companies making piano rolls. One has never ceased production since the first player went on the market in the 1880's.

They are available for about $1.50. It is possible to get rolls punched with the very latest popular songs, words included.

The average home-owner thinks of player pianos mainly as a piano that has to be pumped. There are, as well, players which are run by an electric motor and which can reproduce all the expression of a live performance.

Listening to the reproducing piano in the next room, it was impossible to tell the difference between one played manually and one automatically.

Coin-operated machines are left almost entirely in the realm of the collector. These machines weigh upwards of 1,200 pounds and belted out the popular rag-time tunes at the drop of a nickel.

Fully automatic

Ken's collection includes a 1920 reproducing piano; fully automatic, it will play, rewind and even replay rolls by itself. It was built for a hotel. Ken is its fourth owner.

His pride is a coin-operated Wurlitzer piano with an elaborate window in the front of leaded Tiffany glass.

It pounded out tune after tune in a house of ill repute in the Adirondacks in New York State. The large machine, built in 1912, is a descendant of the smaller barrel organs.

Also filling Ken's living room are shelves filled with more than 1,000 piano rolls of various sizes, a manually-operated "orguinette" made in Montreal in 1868, a Berlinner disc phonograph which later appeared as the trademark for RCA Victor and a phonograph which takes sound from bee's wax cylinders and blares it through a huge fluted horn.

Ken says interest in player pianos, as well as antique phonographs, is growing at a rapid pace.

If enough of them are discovered and restored, he says, there might come a day when player pianos will again be the centre of attention.

Ragtime Society Secretary Jim Kinnear "puts another nickel in" Ken's Wurlitzer coin-operated piano. Other gems owned and restored by Ken include a Willis (Ampico) expression reproducing piano and a Peerless piano-pipe organ made by the National Electric Piano Co. (Ragtime Society photo)

RECORDS

Vincent Terbois, Switzerland, sends us news of a recent release on the SAYDISC label called "Cylinder Jazz" - Early Jazz and Ragtime recordings from 1897 - 1928. This record, which was spotted by Henri Parisot, is described by Vincent as "rather scratchy but worth while nevertheless." Here's the lineup:

Side A: MAKE THAT TROMBONE LAUGH - Harry Raderman's Jazz Orch. - circa 1922
INTERNATIONAL CAKEWALK - Fred van Epps (banjo) - circa 1904-05
HUNGARIAN RAG - New York Military Band - circa 1914-15
AT A GEORGIA CAMP MEETING - Edison Grand Concert Band - circa 1897
HIAWATHA RAG - Ollie Oakley (banjo) - circa 1904
MEADOW LARK - Duke Yellman and His Orch. - circa 1928

Side B: DARDANELLA - Harry Raderman's Jazz Orch. - circa 1922
COCONUT DANCE - Vess L. Ossman (banjo) - circa 1905
NIGHTIME IN LITTLE ITALY - Frisco Jass Band - circa 1921
BILL BAILEY WON'T YOU PLEASE COME HOME - Burt Sheppard (voc & piano) - ca 1903
HIAWATHA RAG - Edison Concert Band - circa 1904
TEASING MEDLEY - Edison Military Band - circa 1905
MY SUMURAN GAL - Vess L. Ossman (banjo) - circa 1912

This record is listed as Volume 1 in the SAYDISC Historic Jazz Series; Volume 2 is "Pianola Jazz Rolls" to be released this coming winter, and Volume 3 is "Mechanical Jazz" (cylinders, rolls, street pianos and Polyphons) with no definite release date given. Anyone interested in obtaining the "Cylinder Jazz" LP should write directly to: SAYDISC Specialized Recordings Ltd., The Meeting House, Frenchay, Bristol. Presumably this means Bristol, England.

ROLL CUTTERS

William Wildman, who is serving aboard the USS Dahlgren, writes: "Last year before I enlisted I was fooling around with the idea of building a roll perforator. I never got as far as building a full-size machine, but I did manage to come up with a one-slot electric punch similar to the individual units QRS uses in its master roll cutter. I built two units before I came up with the operating principles. The last vibrator could make over 2300 cuts per minute (roll speed about 100) and perforate up to three sheets of standard roll paper at a time."

Bill, could we ask you a great favor -- do you think you could find the time to do an article for the Newsletter on roll cutting? You obviously have the knowledge and experience. Both we and our readers would be most interested to learn just how rolls are cut, both on a commercial basis (such as QRS) and by a gifted amateur like yourself. Any drawings, diagrams or other illustrations would helpful, too. No fooling -- this is one area the Newsletter has barely, if ever, touched on. Let's see if we can get a little action going on the subject of rolls, roll cutting and player pianos. All contributions are most welcome.

OUR APOLOGIES

The lead article in the last issue suffered from an almost illegible illustration - the trio of Percy Wenrich's FLOWER GIRL - for which we apologize. On the next page is a full-size reproduction of the music which should prove a little more readable.

TRIO. FLOWER GIRL by Percy Wenrich, 1907

SCARCE RECORDS, AND WHERE TO LOOK FOR THEM

Jean DeBoe of Wenonah, N.J., writes: "Noticed on pages 14-15 of the April-May 1966 Newsletter your appeal for help in finding Chris Barber's record ELITE SYNCOPATIONS. There are some jazz record shops in the United States (they also carry ragtime records) which you might try, as follows:

Don Brown
Jazzman Record Shop
2689 West Pico Boulevard
Los Angeles 6, California

Ray Avery's Rare Records
415 East Broadway
Gendale, California 91205

Jack's Record Cellar
254 Scott Street
San Francisco, Calif. 94117

When you write to any of the above, please be so kind as to say that Jean DeBoe sent you."

PERFORMERS

Don't hear too much from Bob Darch these days, but received a "just a line to say hello" card a while ago mailed from Omaha, Nebraska. Let's have your itinerary, Bob.

Johnny Maddox referred a new professional performer to us recently in the person of Miss Cindy Persichette who plays ragtime piano in Denver and in Central City, Colorado. Welcome to the Society, Cindy; drop us a line and tell us a bit more about yourself.

DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL . . .

And how about that new Mickie Finn's show on NBC? Ragtime it maybe isn't, but it's about the most fun you can have without laughing. Be sure to catch it (also on CBC). Could one of our West Coast members tell us something about the original Finn nitery, and the musicians on the show?

Boogie-woogie is older form of the colorful classic jazz

By DAVE LORENTZ

In a dim, dingy room, a poorly-dressed man sits playing a beat-up old piano. As he finishes a number, a voice from the darkness requests the perennial favorite with a "Come on, Meade 'Lux,' play 'Honky Tonk Train' once."

What's the scene? This is boogie-woogie, a form of piano jazz popular in the 1920's and 1930's in the big cities. The man is Mead "Lux" Lewis, one of the best pianists playing boogie-woogie, and the song is "Honky Tonk Train Blues," one of the most popular and best-known boogies ever played.

Boogie-woogie is one of the older forms of classic (as opposed to modern) jazz. Many of the pianists were untrained in piano and could not read music but had African rhythm and blues harmony just aching to be released.

Guitars prominent.

The form originally started as a kind of hard and driving guitar blues. Several guitars played a repeating bass, and another improvised a blues melody on top of this foundation.

When the musicians moved from the country to the city, where pianos were available, they found that a piano could do everything several guitars could and several things guitars could not. So boogie--woogie started in the country on the guitar, moved to the city, and changed to a piano music.

Another reason for the repeating bass is that the untrained musicians found it easier to improvise with their right hands if they did not have to pay any attention to their left hands, which were playing from pure habit.

Bass effective.

Also, the right kind of repeating bass is much more hard and driving than any completely improvised left hand could be. The habitual, memorized bass is more solid and less hesitant than an improvised one that has not yet proved itself.

Most of the great boogie men started in Chicago, with the exception of Pete Johnson, who came from Kansas City. Mr. Lewis, Albert Ammons and the dainty little man who was the greatest of them all, Jimmy Yancey, all played in Chicago. They wrote and played boogies that jazz buffs still look for in old phonograph records.

Ammons' style rocking.

Mr. Ammons had a down-to-earth style that rocked the house, with both hands full of overstuffed chords. "Lux" Lewis was not so straight and orthodox, but stuck in unexpected little bits of harmony, rhythm, and bass style in unusual places. These additions made his playing less monotonous and more evenful and interesting than Mr. Ammon's.

Mr. Yancy was acknowledged by everyone to be the best boogie-woogie pianist of all. His songs sound very simple on his records, but playing from the sheet music transcripbed from the recordings is incredibly difficult.

I has been said that nobody can play Yancey but Mr. Yancey. His music is graceful and delicate, with a very simple but unusual and effective bass. No matter what key he played in, he always modulated to the key of E flat at the end of the number.

Johnson style different.

Mr. Johnson, from Kansas City, was raised in the middle of a different jazz style than the other three, so it is not surprising that his boogie style was correspondingly different. He played with a straight beat (the same beat that Chubby Checkers used), and went as hard and fast as he could, using regular Kansas City-type phrasing.

When boogie-woogie began to be popular, the three lesser pianists, Mr. Ammons, Mr. Lewis, and Mr. Johnson were ahead of Ferrante and Teicher by forty years. The three formed a boogie-woogie trio and went to New York. Persons enjoyed their music and it became a fad like folk music.

Bob Crosby, the Dorsey brothers, and others made arrangements of the better-known boogies for their bands. The band version of "Pine Top's Boogie" still is played by dance bands today'

Popularity declines.

Later, because of glutting of the market by Tin Pan Alley, boogie-woogie lost much of its popularity, and survived only because of two things. The jazz buffs still liked the old classic boogies, and the popularity-or lack of popularity did not affect this consideration of quality.

Also, many of the characteristics of boogie-woogie were creeping into the style of music that was to degenerate into rock-'n-roll, so the teenagers would preserve a little of the old music for a long time to come.

Reprinted from the Indiana Daily Student, December 12, 1964, by permission of the author

When Jim Kinnear asked me to join the staff of The Ragtime Society, I'm sure he had no idea he'd wind up with something like "Winging It", because with a little bit of luck and a lot of help from you it will largely be made up of opinion, mis-information, prejudice, ill conceived notions, lies, and trash.

It's not that I'm opposed to new analytical or historical facts on ragtime, not at all; it's just that the likelihood of coming up with things like that is pretty slim when all you've got for resources is a 1947 Smith-Corona typewriter, two copies of THEY ALL PLAYED RAG-TIME, and a lot of nerve. I'm going to "wing it", but you've got to help.

One thing I've noticed about ragtime fans is that they usually have a sackful of interesting opinions and ideas about ragtime, but are reluctant to become associated, in print, with anything not solidly documented or which is controversial. Now if the people with opinions could get them off their chests and into the Newsletter, they'd feel better and we'd all have some interesting new ideas to think about.

Hopefully, "Winging It" will make this possible by presenting your opinions as opinions -- nothing more. It will be a ragtime bull session, a soapbox, a words and paper psychiatric

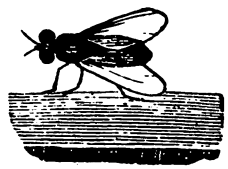
couch, a debate, a banzai charge. You don't have to be an authority or have any kind of ragtime credentials to get in on the fun -- all you need is an opinion.

To get things started off, here's a portion of a wild letter I received not long ago from a friend of mine whose name I'll withhold. (I wouldn't want a ragtime mayhem squad to catch up with him some dark night.)

"You think the red vested, eleven fingered rag smasher was bad -- goodbye ragtime! What about guys like Joplin and their lace curtain cool rags for piano playing old ladies and lily ears who want to feel a little sporty -- goodbye ragtime! That's right, mother, just play as written. No swing -- it's vulgar. No sweat, sit up straight, and that's the way you play the rags. It sounds like chamber music with just a touch of bordello.

"Pity the poor ragtime. As soon as the old ladies quit feeling playful, that was it. Nobody else was interested. The stuff was too unreal, too arty for the people who had picked ragtime on banjos, thumped it out on old upright pianos, danced to it, sang it, and loved it. Neither did it belong to the conservatory crowd. It was too naive. When they acknowledged its existence at all, it was with a pretty-good-considering-where-it-came-from pat on the head, or a more honest kick in the pants.

"So while the old ladies sat in their front parlors playing cool ragtime, the rest of the ragtime world went by outside, marching behind a jazz band playing ragtime; or down to the corner saloon where "Jelly Roll" Morton, Charlie Thompson, James P. Johnson, and ten million other "ticklers" were beating out the real stuff. Jazz-ragtime, ragtime-jazz, it was all the same. Maybe the rags had more parts -- sure, but you played them your way, whether they had four strains or just one. They knew that the music belonged to them, the performers and their audiences -- not to the composers, and that all the instructions necessary for playing them should come from their own ability and idea of good form.

"Today 60 years later, things haven't changed much. The conservatories still aren't interested, the old ladies and their starch-backed cohorts are still playing rags straight and trying to get everybody else to do it their way, and the real ragtime performers -- although few in number -- are still playing real ragtime (thank goodness)."

Now whatever you think about this letter (and I hope you do), you must admit that the writer was really "Winging It." He raises several interesting, and I hope provocative, questions. Did Joplin write "cool"rags? What's a "hot" rag? Which kind is better? Does a piece of music "belong" to the composer or to the performer? What's your opinion?